

CURSORY RHYMES

Other Books by the Same Author

Verse

LONDON SONNETS
SHYLOCK REASONS WITH
MR. CHESTERTON
KENSINGTON GARDENS
THE UNKNOWN GODDESS
HUMORESQUE
VOLUME IN THE AUGUSTAN
POETS
REQUIEM
THE SILVER 'CAT' (*In the Press*)
OTHERS ABIDE

Satire

LAMPOONS
NEWS OF THE DEVIL

Prose

CIRCULAR SAWS

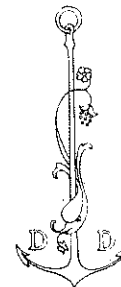
CURSORY RHYMES

by Humbert Wolfe

Illustrated

by

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INVOCATION

FOR
MY DAUGHTER
ANN

C H I L D R E N, there is a lady, who
is younger far than all of you,
who played your games, before you played them,
with Cain and Abel, when they made them,
and who will play them to the end
with the last child, and his last friend.
You do not know her name, nor will,
but you may hear, when all is still,
between the trample of this verse
a quiet footstep that is hers.

PREFACE

THE reason why this book is verse
(and nothing, I admit, is worse)
is that, as every schoolboy knows,
it takes much longer to write prose.

P.S.

If someone tries to make you learn it,
just take the beastly book, and burn it.

INTRODUCTION

I

✓
T H E Y tell me, children,
you have some
fugitive Elysi-
um

where, while your baffled
elders pass
through what to them is
common grass,

you walk in fields,
where never fell
or snow or rain, through
asphodel.

It may be so. I pray
it is.

But I at least re-
member this,

that I myself, when
I was seven,
instead of wandering
in heaven,

insisted most
whole-heartedly
on being nothing else
than me,

and liked the daisy
most, because
it went on being
what it was.

And therefore if to
me the sun
is just a means
of waking one,

and if to starshine
I prefer
the polish on a
banister,

and if I play my
private game
of being constantly
the same

(which is the circumstance
that wrings
my heart in ordinary
things),

don't think that
I am trying to
write, as though I
were one of you,

or writing (which is
even worse)
what I suppose a
child prefers.

I have no views. I only
know
that fifty thousand
years ago

the things I write of
were not new.
That's why I like them. But
will you ?

II

N o R, children, would
 I have you think
 I rub my spectacles,
 and blink,

or murmur whimsically
 abject
 apologies, when
 you're the subject

of conversation.

No! I've found
 that children, taking
 them all round,

are not the least
 bit better than
 their parents. And
 indeed I can

remember some, that
 I would gladly
 have smothered, when they
 slammed doors madly,

or when they shouted
 down the stairs,
 or badgered me
 with their affairs,

or went on asking
 me the time,
 or got their beastly
 dogs to climb

upon my knee, and shed
 their coat
 all over me, and what
 I wrote.

While others simply
 are the plan
 to which life draws
 a gentleman.

For, with the infant,
 as the grown-up,
 the truth, if we're prepared
 to own up,

is that it takes all
 sorts to be
 a schoolroom, or a
 nursery,

though possibly there's
 nothing quite
 so ineradicably
 right

as children who
 enchant the air
(like Ann) by
 merely being there.

I warn you, therefore,
 if you look
for adulation
 in this book,

or for an attitude
 of dim
belief that you are
 seraphim,

or for a poet who is
 handing
out sweet, indulgent
 understanding,

you will not find it.
 All you'll find
is something I have had
 in mind

since I was six. And
 if it's rotten,
it only shows that I've
 forgotten.

POEMS AGAINST DOCTORS



I

THE doctors are a frightful race.
I can't see how they have the face
to go on practising their base
profession; but in any case
I mean to put them in their place.

II

THEIR AVARICE

THE doctor lives by chicken pox,
by measles, and by mumps.
He keeps a microbe in a box
and cheers him when he jumps.

at unsuspecting children, who
have two important nurses;
but if it bounds where less than two
are kept, he simply curses.

His greed is such that though you ache
in every limb, be sure
if there is nothing else to take,
he'll take your temperature.

And if at first he can't succeed,
he has another try,
and takes your pulse. Some people plead
"The man must live!" But why?

III

THEIR IGNORANCE

AND then besides. It makes me boil
the way he snarls "Cod Liver Oil"
in a loud tone, or even louder
"I think we'll try a soothing powder."
Powder be blowed! Do you suppose
that any Doctor really knows
where powders go when they are taken,
why medicine bottles should be shaken—
or what's the matter with your lung
by making faces at your tongue!
Of course he can't. The truth is that
he doesn't know what he is at,
but must say something or another
to satisfy your anxious mother,
who never is content until
his medicines make you really ill.
The thing to do is to be firm,
and tell the creature he's a worm,
and, when he breaks into a stammer,
smash all the bottles with a hammer,
mix pills and powders, and then stir
the mess with the thermometer.
Next leave your bed, and order crates
of almond-paste and chocolates,
plum-cake and various kinds of peels,
eat them before and after meals.



And as for diet, swallow jam on
hot buttered toast with pounds of salmon,
a lemon-squash with straws to suck its
sugar, and water-ice in buckets.
And, last of all, when he is ill,
with thwarted spite send him your bill.

IV

THEIR CURIOSITY AS COMPARED WITH THAT OF EXPLORERS

THE noblest fellows in the world,
excepting engine-drivers,
are these explorers, who are hurled
ashore with no survivors
on atolls, where a pirate crew
have read their "Treasure Island" through.

What is the force that makes these chaps
leave England, home and beauty?
Is it their health? The Law perhaps?
or just a sense of duty?
or don't you think that it may be
their noble curiosity?

They do not, like the doctor, grope
in surreptitious quest
of pirates with a stethoscope
or listen to their chest,
affirming that the countersign
must always be "Say ninety-nine."

Nor when the ship's boy overhears
the second mate impart
at midnight to the mutineers
the secret of the chart,
do they employ the chart for your
uninteresting temperature.

Nor do they have a pocket-book
in which they make a note,
whenever they shake hands with Hook,
or slit a ruffian's throat,
nor when they ask for ransom is
blackmail described "For services."

Certainly not! They want to know
the meaning of typhoons,
where mammoths, where the buffalo
under what secret moons
have, like Red Indians, with no sound
attained what Happy Hunting Ground?

They steer beyond the evening-star,
and challenge their own dream
to overtake the things that are
behind the things that seem,
and do not care if death should be
the price of curiosity.

Whereas the doctor's only wish
is to discover whether
a child who lives on milk and fish
will vanish altogether,
or change into the sort of fairy
they bring in bottles from the dairy.

Moreover they direct their art
to liver, bile, and lung,
and never notice you've a heart
until a valve is sprung,
and only think about your eyes
the moment when the vision dies.

And thus there are two ways; it seems,
and anyone can choose them,
to risk your life and keep your dreams,
or keep it safe and lose them.
Take your own choice (I don't advise)
of what for you is Paradise.

But whether what you choose is free,
or medically cribbed is,
as with all men your course will be
'twixt Scylla and Charybdis.
But still for heroes there are seas
beyond the Gates of Hercules.

THE BLUECOAT BOY

I

I M E T an angel in the Strand
with an umbrella in his hand,
talking with Paradisal joy
to a bewildered Bluecoat boy.

"And so," he said, "I understand
this also is a Golden Strand,
that has, like heaven, for example,
an edifice they call the Temple,
and leads by such another Bar
as ours to where the glories are
of what they tell me would be witty
to name the Uncelestial City.

Well! well! Let us examine it."

And, while he spoke, the street was lit
with some strange glory. Tired faces
shone like the sun in country places;
and people's voices sounded, when
they spoke, like chords by Beethoven;
the motor-buses had the hot
splendour of a chariot;
the houses by the Aldwych were
as arrogant as Lucifer;
the island-churches, like a crowd
of golden starlings, cried aloud,
till none could say which were the bells,
and which were simply miracles;
the very paving-stones were led,
enchantly astonished,

into a crazy pattern, laid
to trap the moss in ambushade.
Indeed the whole excited town
glowed like a shy, delicious noun,
when some great poet lets it live
at last beside its adjective.

And then I saw, like a superb
hawker, the angel at the curb
set London working like a toy—
and give it to the Bluecoat boy.

II

KING CHARLES the First
at Charing Cross
gazes from his
solemn horse

down the street
by which he went
into Marvell's *
sacrament,

while Lord Nelson
in his Square
finds Trafalgar
everywhere.

Then you'll see how
hate has drawn,
in its image,
"Brussels: Dawn"

to describe the
statue of
her, whose latest
word was "love."

* *I.e.* Andrew Marvell, poet.

Finally the pavement
crawls
with forgotten
generals,

who, preserved in
bronze or lead,
are no thicker
in the head.

These are all the
guide-book tells of
in the ambit of
the bells of

grey St. Martin's. But
for such,
as a poet's dream
can touch,

there's the ghostling
of a statue,
that, when you look up,
looks at you,

holding in his hand
a fistful
of the gay, immortal,
wistful

pictures that
one Bluecoat Boy
fashioned with
the angel's toy,

when he watched
the glory fall
softly on Christ's
Hospital.

When? & where? & who?
The date is
somewhere early in
the 'Eighties

when King George the
Third was King,
and the time (let's say) was
Spring,

when its urban
lovelinesses
lit his Temple's
"green recesses."

And his name? You'd
find, I think,
written in deliberate
ink

in his notebook, "Sirs
I am,
Yours obediently,
Charles Lamb."

NURSE

NURSE

S O M E people say
that if you sit
alone in the nursery
with no lamp lit,

and look through your hands
till you've counted thirty
(provided you can and
your hands aren't dirty !)

Through the chink in your fingers
you'll see in the deep
armchair, an old woman
who seems asleep.

There's no need to wake her,
because it seems
we are all of us only
the things she dreams,

and the smaller you are
the easier
you become a part of
the dreams and of her.

As to her name it
might be worse
(others have done it)
than call her "Nurse."

As to her age there
never was
any nurse quite so
old, because

she admits that she nursed
Hans Andersen
when he was a little Dane,
and then

when she had done
her task by him
she undertook the
Brothers Grimm,

and when he was fat
as any barrel
who else but she
bathed Lewis Carroll?



These were her nurselings
(children), and
hers was the comfortable hand,

the first, the last,
the only one
for Robert Louis
Stevenson.

What is her secret?
Who knows? but listen!
she has always one more
babe to christen

with the old immortal
fairy dew—
Tug at her shawl; it
might be you.

PRAISE OF FAMOUS MEN

FOREWORD

"LET us now praise famous men"—
Daniel Defoe,
Swift the Dean, Hans Andersen,
the Brothers Grimm also,

Carroll, Lang and Stevenson,
Mrs. Nesbitt, where
Kipling by the road she's gone
walks with de la Mare.

THEIR PRAISE

I

DANIEL DEFOE

LET us speak of Crusoe, who,
in adventure's high day,
on the shores of dreams come true
with his faithful Friday

hunts, and tracks the savages,
setting up his rest
in the isle, where magic seas
consecrate the West.

II

DEAN SWIFT

THEN to Swift, and, though he brag
that we're nothing but
knaves writ large in Brobdignag,
small in Lilliput,

tell him all that he has proved
is that, if we were,
he'd not written, nor we loved
reading, Gulliver.

III

HANS ANDERSEN

T H E N, when you are tucked up snugly,
children, call on Hans,
and the land, where all the ugly
ducklings turn to swans,

and this earth is but a pale
moonlit memory,
with the Chinese nightingale
singing in her tree.

IV

THE BROTHERS GRIMM

T U R N from that to see the witch
hideously bake,
and then build her house of rich
almond paste and cake :

nor be scared for Hans and Gretel,
since Grimm's just pretending
that the story has a fatal
(which it hasn't) ending.

V

LEWIS CARROLL

As for Alice let her stand,
where these shadows pass
into those of Wonderland
through the looking-glass,

on the other side of things
teaching that chess means
that, though pawns cannot be kings,
love will make them queens.

VI

ANDREW LANG

Then, as yellow, green, and grey,
silver, brown, and red
books in brilliant rocket-spray
burst about his head,

and, as petal after petal
climb the skies, and hang,
"Love me," hear him cry, "a little
since I loved you Lang."

VII

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

O R, where grey and cold the bent lands
lean against a cloud,
in a garden by the Pentlands
secret, shy and proud,

there's a boy, who brings his nurse
—Alison—a chain
not of flowers, but of verse
wet with Scottish rain.

VIII

MRS. NESBITT

W H I L E the Treasure-seekers * prove
nothing is so bad
but it yields to children's love
plus a psammead,

and that parents, ordering
children, would do well
to instruct the man to bring
Oswald Bastable.

* The reference is to "The Treasure-Seekers"—that
enchancing book by Mrs. Nesbitt.

IX

RUDYARD KIPLING

T H E N if any sculptor had
captured in mid-spring
father-wolf with one great pad,
grimly threatening

Mowgli, smiling bare and bold,
and cast them, softly stippling
bronze with leaves, half-green, half-gold,
you'd have said "That's Kipling."

X

WALTER DE LA MARE

L A S T, where song itself is vulgar,
beauty, there will swing
past the smallest Mullar-Mulgar,
from a muted string

echoes that, though they enchain the
restless heart of man,
fade, and tremble, and regain the
pale musician.

EPILOGUE

" P R A I S E we therefore famous men "
and, let who'd succeed them,
know they'll too be famous, when
a little child shall read them.

THE NEW DOLL'S HOUSE

FOREWORD

W H A T furniture
from what strange stores
must we provide, what
visitors,
now that Christina
Jane has gone,
and bought a West-end
Mansion ?

I

THE DOORPLATE

FIRST we'll inscribe
upon the plate,
"Who enter here,
abandon hate!"

II

THE SCRAPER

THEN on the scraper
sorrow must
be rubbed off cleanly
with the dust.

III

THE ENTRANCE HALL

N E X T in the entrance
hall we'll hang
a miniature of
Andrew Lang,
writing below, "Lest
we forget—
from Graziosa's
Percinet."

IV

THE DRAWING-ROOM

T H E N in the drawing-
room that should
be exquisite with
satin-wood,
emblem of spring immor-
tal, we
will have a bronze
Persephone.

V

THE BEDROOMS

T H E bedrooms shall be
gay with hints
of flowered Jacobean
chintz,
and all the beds
designed in pale
mahogany by
Chippendale
(weed wide enough,
as William * said,
to wrap a fairy in
her bed).

* *I.e.* W. Shakespeare.

VI

THE GARDEN

T H E garden full of
trees and chickens.

VII

THE LIBRARY

THE library of
Grimm and Dickens.

VIII

THE KITCHENS

AND in the kitchens
we shall come
out strong with
aluminium
and copper pans, but
best of all,
I think, we'll like
the Servants' Hall.

IX

THE STAFF

BECAUSE as servants
 for this palace
 we'll have the footmen
 out of "Alice" *
 (but not, I think, the
 cook, unless
 we're short of pepper)
 and—oh yes!
 to see that people
 use the scrapers,
 the housemaid out of
 "Pickwick Papers." †

* *I.e.* "Alice in Wonderland."

† By Mr. Charles Dickens.

X

THE VISITORS

(A) *The Smaller Fry*

AMONG the smaller fry,
 who'll come
 at intervals, will
 be Tom Thumb,
 the little man who
 had a gun,
 and Jack (I mean the
 beanstalk one),
 the valiant tailor,
 Tiny Tim,
 and Mr. Wordsworth's
 Little Jim,
 Little Miss Muffet,
 and Boy Blue,
 the young Achilles
 whom we knew
 not as a hero
 sulking in

his Trojan tent, but
as the tin
soldier, although a
toy,
braver than all the
kings at Troy.

XI

THE VISITORS

(B) *The Rather Immortals*

T H E N once in every
year for luck
we'll send a tele-
gram to Puck,
and, ringing up the
cowslip's bell,
telephone to Ar-
iel.

XII

THE VISITORS

(C) *The Immortals*

A N D finally when all
things seem
not mine and yours, but
Shakespeare's dream,
will tremble, some
Midsummer night,
luminous in the
candle-light
of the long road from
Babylon,
Titania and
Oberon.

CONCLUSION

S o furnished shall
the house for us
immutably be
populous
with childhood's loves,
since these and verse
have been the two
upholsterers.

THE ZOO

THE ZOO

I SCARCELY think
I like the Zoo
as much as other
people do.

First when I see
the elephants,
they seem in trouble
with their pants,

and then the hippo-
potamus
says, " Who in blazes
made me thus ? "

And I observe the
chimpanzee
thanking his God
he's not like me.

While all varieties
of cat,
make me feel dumpy,
coarse, and fat.

And that's not all !
The eagles make
me stare as though
my heart would break

at the great spaces
of the air.
And why ? it isn't
my affair

if hippo is a
sort of evil
joke perpetrated
by the devil,

and of all broken-
hearted things
the brokenest are
captive wings !

And yet I can-
not like the Zoo
as much as other
people do.

THE RETURN OF THE FAIRY

I

PROEM

I n a little white house,
with a little white gable,
the sort that a mouse
might choose for a stable,
in a little green garden,
with seven green trees
(you must say "beg pardon!"
Miss! when you sneeze),
with a head as neat
as a gold canary,
at the end of the street,
there lived a fairy.

II

DIFFICULTIES IN FAIRYLAND

BUT how had she come there?
 and wherefore? and when?
 On thing at a time! She'd been
 stolen from men;
 and, though she was fairy in
 face, form and size,
 there was always the shadow
 of earth in her eyes.
 There was always a whisper
 that set her apart
 in the jewel they gave her in
 place of a heart,
 which lent to her music
 the beauty that springs
 from the menace of death
 in immortal things.
 But the fairies were puzzled
 and, after a bit,
 they complained to the Queen
 that her favourite,
 though the first in the ballet,
 the sweetest in song,
 had a touch that put all of
 the rest of them wrong

III

THE QUEEN'S DECISION TO BANISH HER FAVOURITE

AND the Queen, though she loved her
 not least for the child
 through her merriest laughter
 that solemnly smiled,
 lest sorrow might stain with
 her maculate beauty
 the mirrors of fairyland,
 deemed it her duty
 to send back her changeling
 to earth, knowing well
 she might vanish for ever,
 or might by a spell,
 if one could be found
 to recapture her, be
 for ever reclaimed from
 mortality.
 She consulted the masters
 of magic, and found
 that a changeling sent back
 for a test, could be bound
 to observe one condition, which, broken.
 they reckoned
 would bring back the truant that
 actual second.

IV

THE CONDITION OF HER RESIDENCE THERE

I T was therefore proclaimed
 that the sprite N or M
 (of course she had names but
 I mayn't mention them),
 as a mark of high favour
 was ordered to leave
 for what men call London
 on Midsummer Eve.
 She might go where she pleased,
 and stay at her will
 as long as she liked, unless
 and until
 she forgot, if she made
 the merest suggestion,
 when living with men, of what
 might be a question,
 it was laid down by statute
 (so let her beware)
 she would instantly fade,
 and dissolve on the air.

V

HER DEPARTURE FROM FAIRYLAND

S H E left with a dash
 in the little gold cab
 that the atomies draw
 when escorting Queen Mab;
 and the Court saw her off
 with confetti and rice,
 and the Queen, before all of them,
 kissed her mouth twice.
 And the fairy within her cried,
 "Why should I go?
 I will stay with my own." But
 the mortal said "No!"
 Yet she dared not look back
 upon fairyland,
 lest she saw her Queen stretching
 an empty hand.

VI

HER ARRIVAL IN LONDON

S H E had packed in a hurry
her wand, and her wings,
(and the magical paste
ran all over the things),
a stamp book, a box of
ridiculous shoes,
three cakes, and large stocks of
the sweets fairies use.
But when, with a suit-case
(the sort that a midge
might use for a boot-case)
she reached London Bridge,

VII

THE HOUSING SHORTAGE

S H E found, to her horror,
that nobody clinches
a bargain with persons
of less than two inches ;
and, moreover, that no one,
is able or willing
to let you a house that
would fit on a shilling.
And as she remembered
the terms of the spell
she couldn't consult with
a constable.
She had sat down to think
when, who should pass by
but an impudent rag
of a tit who chirped, " Why,
if you're seeking a nest,
and they won't let you take one,
don't you act like the rest
of us fellows, and make one ? "
She couldn't ask " Where ? "
but she saw he had gone
along Piccadilly to
Kensington.

VIII

UNASSISTED BUILDING SCHEME

So like any of us
 Kensington or Hyde Parkers,
 she climbed on the bus
 that stops opposite Barker's.
 But where she got down, at
 what street, and what number,
 I am far too excited
 just now to remember.
 Then just as she was
 directly that minute,
 she made a blue print of
 the house and all in it.
 And she built the whole thing
 from the roof to the cellar
 with a wave of her wand.
 But with no one to tell her
 (and with no one to ask) that
 no building would be
 complete without kitchen,
 and taps (H and C),
 (because fairies, who bask in
 perpetual summer
 don't cook, and don't wash,
 and don't call in the plumber),
 she didn't include them;
 and what was still harder

for the maids, she'd forgotten
 to build them a larder.
 And it wasn't until
 on the very first morning
 when the maid said "No sink,"
 and promptly gave warning,
 that, pleading in terror,
 that, if there were not
 it was merely an error,
 she added the lot.

IX

TROUBLES WITH THE STAFF

A N D besides, she omitted
 to notice, the staff
 were too tall by about
 seven foot and a half.
 So she had to employ
 a mouse for the cook
 (who ate every page
 of the recipe book),
 as butler she chose a
 green-liveried cricket,
 who, when handing a plate
 was accustomed to lick it,
 and the maid was a snail
 who hid in her shell
 whenever they wished her
 to answer the bell.
 In addition to these
 there were thirty-nine persons,
 for the cook had insisted
 on bringing all her sons.
 The maid brought her cousins,
 the butler his brother,
 till it seemed she'd go bankrupt
 one way and another,
 from which she was happily
 saved by the fact
 that she fed them by magic,
 and kept them by tact.

X

HER UNRELIABILITY IN THE MATTER OF NAMES

T H E N as to her name, the pitiful
 fact is,
 that, not being told of
 our usual practice,
 she let it be known
 that, for personal reasons,
 she preferred it to change
 with the change of the seasons.
 She was Lilac in May-time,
 Carnation in June,
 Aurora by day-time,
 Diana by moon.
 But in March and November,
 in rain or in squall,
 she didn't remember
 to have one at all.

XI

HER ACERBITY IN THE MATTER OF CLOTHES

T H E N, as to her dresses,
 she kept in the attic
 a bevy of silkworms,
 and worked them emphatic
 at widening petals,
 and taking a seam
 in a gown that a spider
 had stitched in a dream;
 or at hemming a jacket
 of thistledown puff
 with an eyelash to tack it,
 when slender enough;
 or at using his whole skin,
 bequeathed by a gnat,
 to make her a moleskin
 to go with her hat.

XII

THE GARDEN

S H E had other strange habits,
e.g. paraffin,
 which she used for her rabbits
 without and within.
 And the hens had a groom for
 their feathers and legs,
 till the day hadn't room for
 the laying of eggs.
 And she kept an old linnet
 to act as the gardener,
 who went about hobblin'
 and said life was hard on 'er,
 because she objected
 to having her face
 and her wings disinfected
 all over the place.

XIII
THE LAMENTABLE ABSENCE OF CALLERS

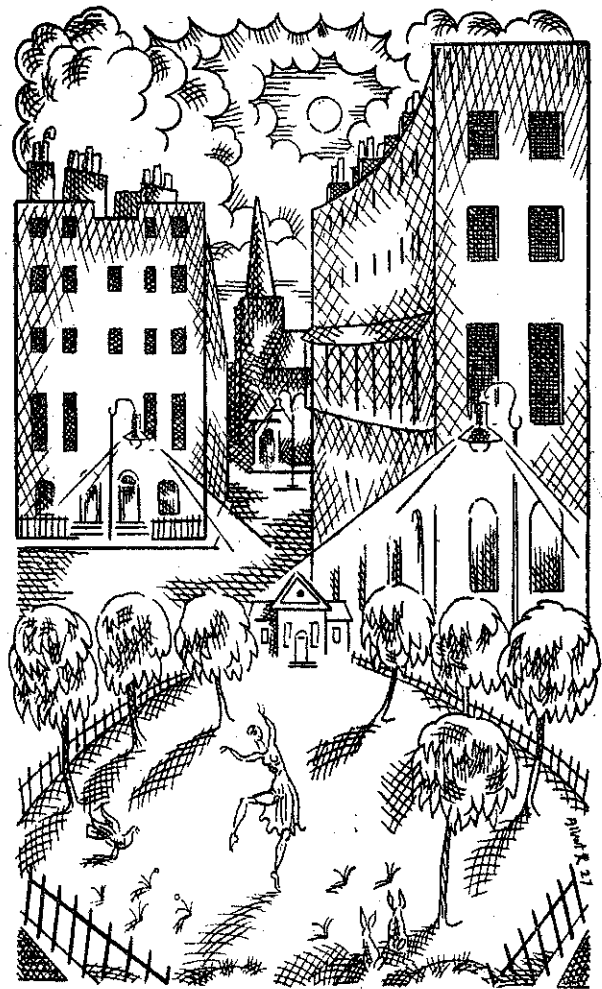
T H E N, as day followed day,
she sat in the hall
in case any mortal
should happen to call ;
but nobody came, because
no one was able
to enter the house with
the little white gable.
And even the post, and the taxes
and rates
passed by without trying
the little white gates.
And, indeed, there were many
who, since it was small
and beautiful, said it was not
there at all.
She summoned the butler
at last in despair,
but all he would do
was to leap in the air ;
while the maid (when at last they
had wakened her) said,
" Well, what is the matter with
staying in bed ? "
And the cook, who was found
eating cheese on the shelf,
believed in one's keeping
one's self to one's self.

XIV
DESPAIR

W H A T was to be done ? It
would have been quicker
to go round and call on the
Doctor or Vicar,
and ask their advice. But
the terms of the spell
unluckily made that
impossible.
Then she thought of the papers,
but alas ! when she wrote
the stamp was so big that
it covered the note.

XV
THE SECOND MIDSUMMER EVE

S H E became so depressed that
I really believe,
when she sat in her garden
on Midsummer Eve,
she never observed that
far down on the right
a little dark lantern was
showing a light,
nor heard the first
magical whisper begin
of a voice half an opal and
half violin,
nor felt how the air
grew as sweet as the hush
between the two thrills in
the song of a thrush.
The little white house grew
dimmer, and seemed
not a house but a little white
thought she had dreamed,
and each little tree was a
little green tale
that was sung in her dream
by a nightingale—
the tale that still ends where
the song had begun,
East of the Moon, and
West of the Sun.



XVI
THE DANCE

THE N still in her dream
she held out her hand,
as they do when they dance
in fairyland.
And, though nobody took it,
she moved to the tune
elves play on the harp
(but the strings are the moon)
on the lawns of the margins
untrodden, that gleam
at the edge of the world and
the edge of the dream,
when the Court of the Fairies
on Midsummer's Eve
renew their enchantments,
and swayingly weave
the dance of oblivion, of
final release,
the promise in silver of
death's perilous peace.
She danced in the moon, as
wind-tossed in a meadow
a single narcissus will dance
with her shadow.
And she saw, as she danced,
the lattices glimmer,
where clematis climbs in
a different summer.

XVII
JOURNEY'S END

AND then as she danced,
forgetting the spell,
it seemed as though rain
on her eyelashes fell
(and, if they were tears, since no
fairy can shed them,
the moon and the nightingale
must have misled them),
and she cried in her terror,
"Where am I?" The tune
that instant grew louder, a
cloud hid the moon,
and, as though the whole night
were a string to her hand,
the musicianer answered,
"In fairyland."
And when the cloud lifted
there was nothing to see
but the grass, and the moon
dancing delicately.

THE PALACE

THE PALACE

WILT thou? let us make a dream.
I'll be two inches high.
You shall be even slighter,
and deft as a butterfly.
We'll steal away with the dawn
a long day's march through the clover,
and the daisies will sprinkle dew
on the tiny love and her lover.
We'll gather the chestnut blossom
(if we can) where it lovely lies,
and I will wear one in my bosom,
but yours will shine in your eyes.
We'll see the enormous sparrows
like eagles fan the air,
and mine will be rising to heaven,
but yours will be waiting there.
And we'll take our rest at noontide
at the inn of summer weather,
whose ancient sign is the Time, and the Place,
and the Loved One altogether.
And at evening we'll reach the golden
Palace of Never Before,
and I shall be winding the Slughorn,
but you will open the door.

THE SICK CHILD IN KENSINGTON

THE SICK CHILD IN KENSINGTON

W H A T are the Gardens
where lemon trees
bloom ? Are they Gardens
mother, like these ?

What are the Gardens
where laurel grows
and myrtle ? Mother,
what Gardens are those ?

Where is the Palace
with gold rooms ? Is
the palace a palace,
mother, like this ?

Where is the palace
with statues at
the high, cold windows ?
What palace is that ?

Where is the river
whose coils entwine
the hill ? Is it, mother,
like Serpentine ?

Where blow the lemon-trees,
where stands the hill,
mother ? And why are
my Gardens so still ?

CONVALESCENCE

I

W H E N you sit propped in bed
you seem to me
something a poet said
impulsively.

And when you gaze in grave unwinking
silence, it is as though
they were not thoughts that you were thinking,
but flakes of snow.

And when you speak the moment after
not words, but shadows flit
softly, as though the sun were laughter,
and light were made of it.

II

W H E N Ann sat up
the sap began—
spring's guttersnipe—
to rap—and ran;

and though the trees were
black as ink,
they understood the
sap, I think.

THE HOLLOW



THE HOLLOW

No one plays in the Hollow. Here
are no explorers. The traders in fur
trade no more dreams. Sir Bedivere
has broken the brand Excalibur.

No Mowgli, crouching in a thicket,
watches Shere Khan, nor wonders if
he wouldn't rather bat first wicket,
like J. T. Brown with Tunncliffe.

Long John Silver has found the Island,
where all men leave their treasure behind.
There are no children now in my land;
no one plays there—except the wind.

SEASIDE

SEASIDE

FIRST, the luggage cart—
eleven trunks, four cases, a bath, a perambulator
and me on it for a start;
but, not an ordinary cart, not an ordinary load,
rumbling and grumbling down the steep side
of Parkfield Road.

No! a cart that has the tang of the sea about it,
and the grip
of the first strange mast against the skyline, of
the first ship,
and all the trunks (and me) wearing the magical
shapes
of the old traveller's cargo of dreams—of pea-
cocks and apes.

Then Manningham railway station, changing
from a railway
to the moon's path across the seas, the still, the
pale way.

And the train bewitched, like the traveller's cargo,
in the transient daylight disguise of boyhood's
Argo,

and the heroes quietly watching the captain at
the prow,
and all the oars striking together, as he suddenly
orders "Now!"

Then lunch in the train!

Don't you wish that you could taste ambrosia
again?

Whether it be hard-boiled eggs with salt in a
paper packet,

or cold chicken with a drum-stick, and white
young teeth to crack it.

But you are not really eating cold chicken or eggs,
but the funny small tarry smell of barrels and kegs,
the thin heart-shaking masts, the unbelievable
blue

huge ocean that will suddenly envelop you
till you feel like a swaying jelly-fish (you did, if
I knew you)

with the green light of the water positively
pouring through you.

You are eating the drive in the fly along the
parade to the lodging,

seven of you hunched together, and shouting,
and dodging

one another's knees; you are eating the queer
smell

of faded leather (after all these years I can feel
the smell come,

like pot-pourri out of a jar), the landlady bidding
you welcome,

the shiny blue bucket with a gold rim, quite a
good one,

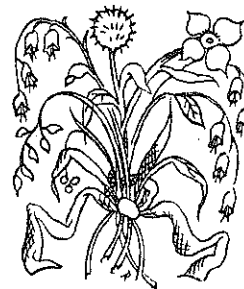
to make up for the steel spade you wanted, and
they made you have a wood one—

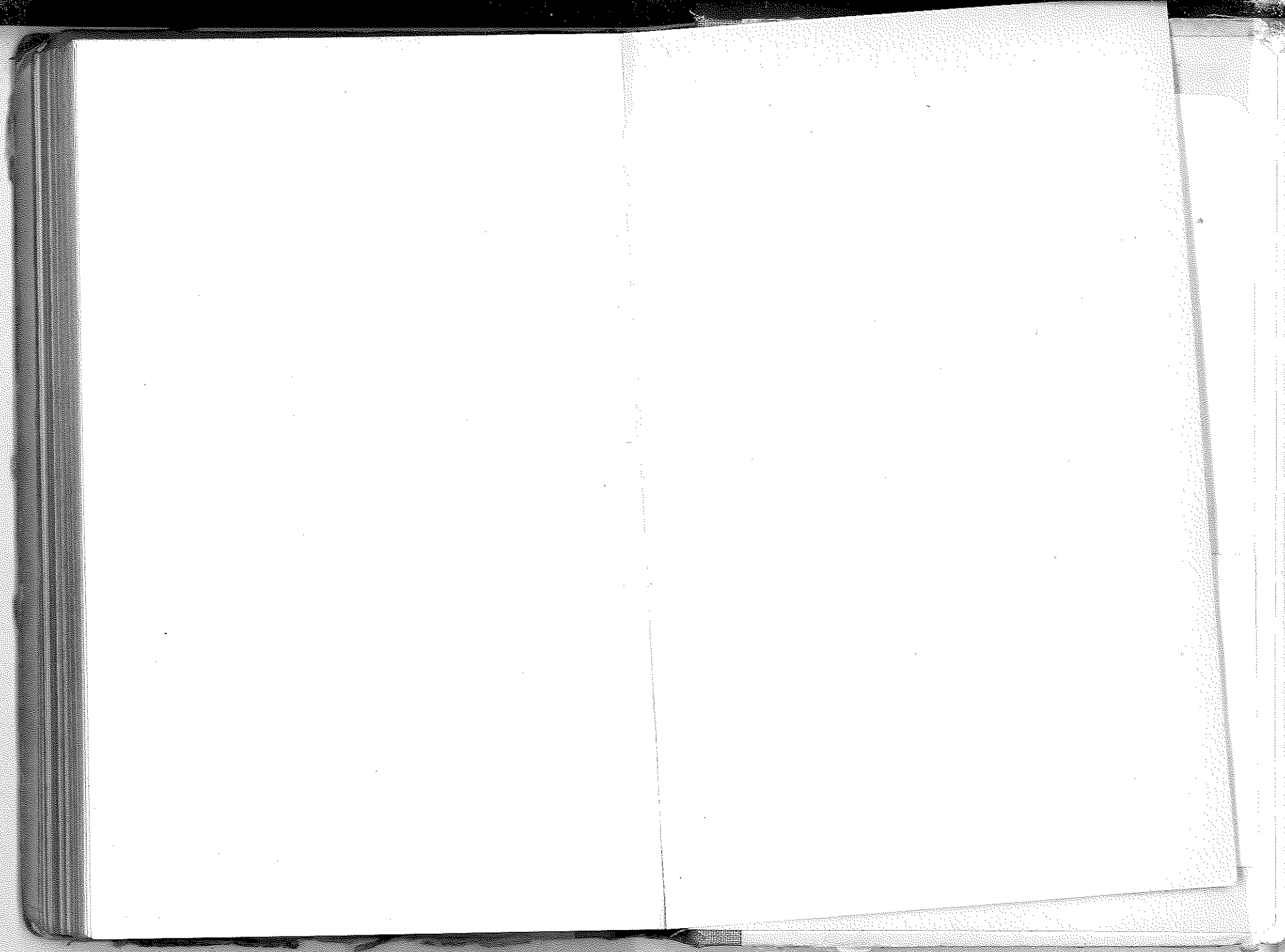
all these you eat, but most of all you are eating
(and do not know) the pause there's no repeating
when Time, that traps all gay and lovely things,
like a tall angel, folds his gull-shaped wings,
and whispers, with two fingers raised, that brush
the small bright head, to his loud legions "Hush!"

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

I F I had been a father gander,
I could have made these rhymes far grander.
But, as it is, if they're no use,
thank God! there's always Mother Goose.





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Wolfe, Humbert
Cursory rhymes



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